



Managing Holiday Blues and Stress

Singing the Holiday Blues

It's not uncommon to feel down around the holidays. Despite all the tidings of good cheer, many people experience bouts of stress, anxiety and winter depression that begin before and last through the holiday season. There are many mental and physiological factors that may be causing these symptoms, including:

Unrealized expectations. It is natural to feel somewhat pressured to buy the perfect gift, to keep family and friends entertained and to get in the spirit of the season. If you do not meet these expectations, you may feel disappointed.

Negative associations with the holidays. Perhaps your parent, spouse or other loved one passed away recently; the holidays can be an emotional reminder of that loss.

Anticlimactic feelings. It is difficult to top the anticipation we feel leading up to the holidays. Once all the festivities have ended, however, it is easy to feel a bit melancholy.

Biological reactions to seasonal changes. Research indicates that lack of sunlight, a hallmark of the winter months in many parts of the world, can disrupt brain hormones and circadian rhythms, which control your body's biological clock. People susceptible to these factors may develop seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a form of depression that commonly begins in early fall and subsides in early spring.

Coping Tips

In addition to getting enough sleep, exercising and eating right, try these suggestions to help manage your feelings of depression during and after the holidays:

- **Talk to a professional.** If the blues you are feeling linger for several weeks and are interfering with your ability to enjoy life and function effectively, seek help.
- **Find support in others.** Try confiding in trusted family members and friends about how you have been feeling.
- **Make more time for fun activities.** Try to spend more time outdoors, especially on sunny days. Consider taking a vacation, perhaps to a bright, warm climate.
- **Be more social.** Stay in touch with friends and family.
- **Consider using a light box.** These devices have been used successfully to treat SAD.

Here when you need us.

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